

The Significance of Oakland and Magnolia Plantations

Oakland Plantation is the plantation house of Jean Pierre Emmanuel Prud'homme. It was most likely constructed by slaves beginning in 1821. It has been occupied by seven generations of the Prud'homme family. Many of the original outbuildings for this plantation are intact. Many of the surviving structures including the French colonial main house are examples of bousillage construction.



Also important is the landscape, which contains an 1835 bottle garden, a formal entranceway, and intact agricultural fields.

The main house is set at the head of a short alley of live oaks behind a small formal garden.



The parterres are outlined in various kinds of bottles - crock bottles from Scotland, square bitters bottles, round bottom beer bottles from Ireland, torpedo-shaped bottles from England, and

wine bottles from France.



The main house is a large hip roof, raised cottage, with surrounding galleries and 28 chamfered posts. The three dormers on the front are original. Most rooms have double French doors. The interior walls are paneled with random-width boards. Only one of the original mantels remains - a comparatively plain Greek

Revival wooden mantel in one of the bedrooms. The finer marble mantels cracked and were replaced with plain wooden mantels in 1915. Most of the transom doors and floorboards are original.

The plantation includes several outbuildings. The old store - a frame, gable-fronted building - dates from the Civil War era.



Behind the store is the carriage house, an old but nondescript frame building, which was converted into a machine shop in 1960. There are two frame hip roof pigeoniers at opposite ends of the

access lane and a small log carpenter's shop with half dovetail joints at the corners.



Behind the carpenter's shop is an old frame barn that was once a smokehouse; the smoked and charred beams remain.



The overseer's house is a raised cottage that has been re-sided. The largest residence other than the plantation house is the doctor's house, a five-bay frame cottage with a pitched roof. Though much reworked, it still contributes to the overall appearance of the plantation.

Magnolia Plantation was the main plantation house of Ambrose LeComte. It was most likely constructed by slaves in the 1830s. The large plantation house was burned in 1864 by the army of Union General Banks as they retreated to Alexandria after the battles of Mansfield and Pleasant Hill. Construction of the

plantation house was completed in 1899 in an amalgam of Greek Revival and Italianate.

Magnolia Plantation is set along Cane River Lake amid 10 acres of open flat farmland. The big house is surrounded by several 150-year-old live oaks and magnolia trees. The house itself is approached by means of a gravel driveway set on axis with the central front door.

Although the present plantation house dates from 1899, it partially follows the plan of the house that previously occupied the site. The raised plantation house has one principal floor, under a large pitched roof garret. The five-bay plan has a central hall and double parlors with chimneys set between them. There is also a front gallery and a rear gallery that encompasses not only the house but also a rear wing. The house, traditional in form and plan, is large and plain with square post galleries, transom panel doors, and simple Renaissance Revival mantels. The upstairs walls are entirely sheathed in narrow gauge wainscotting with plain mantels. All doors have four panels and windows are sash mounted. The 2½-story structure contains 27 rooms and an extensive collection of Southern Empire and Louisiana furniture.

The plantation includes a number of important outbuilding and dependencies, such as an overseer's house,



slave quarters cabins, a plantation store, a corn crib, a blacksmith shop, a pigeonier, and a cotton press-gin building.



The cotton press-gin building contains a rare cotton press and two types of gins. These remnants of a working plantation are invaluable in understanding southern antebellum agricultural practices. The unusually large overseer's house is a hip-roof, raised Acadian cottage, which is almost completely surrounded by square post galleries. This structure served as the family residence after the Civil War to the reconstruction of the large plantation house. Modifications to the overseer's house include the tin roof and the interior, which is much reworked. The transom, doors, windows, and shutters remain.

Of the original slave dwellings, eight remain in a double

row in the southeast portion of the plantation.



These are brick, two-room, galleried houses with central chimneys and gable parapets - unusually high quality construction for slave cabins. Each fireplace has an iron lintel. There has been some deterioration, including the loss of several parapets, chimney tops, windows, and doors. In addition, some gallery roofs have collapsed. The cotton press dates back to ca. 1830 and is one of about five or six comparable examples in the South. This building also contains 19th century ginning equipment. In addition, the landscape of fields and woodlands

surrounding the plantation are intact.¹

1. Cane River Environmental Assessment by the National Park Service